United Nations A/68/748

General Assembly

Distr.: General
11 February 2014

Original: English

Sixty-eighth session
Agenda item 134
Programme budget for the biennium 2014-2015

Revised estimates relating to the programme budget for the biennium 2014-2015 under section 22, Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia, and section 33, Construction, alteration, improvement and major maintenance

Report of the Secretary-General

Summary

In the present report, the Secretary-General proposes mitigation measures to strengthen the safety and security of United Nations staff at the Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia, based in Beirut.

In late 2013, under the authority vested in him by the General Assembly in resolution 66/249, paragraph 1 (c), relating to unforeseen and extraordinary expenses for security measures, the Secretary-General initiated a comprehensive blast assessment to be conducted of the United Nations House in Beirut. To that end, a specialist firm was commissioned to perform the blast assessment. The results of that specialist assessment were received on 17 January 2014. The proposals of the Secretary-General arise from the findings of that assessment.

The present report sets out the resource requirements for the proposals of the Secretary-General for the biennium 2014-2015. The actions to be taken by the General Assembly are set out in section IV.

14-23320 (E) 260214

Please recycle

Contents

		Page
I.	Introduction	3
	A. Background	3
	B. Security environment and acceptable risk	3
	C. Blast assessment and findings	4
II.	Proposals	5
III.	Resource requirements	8
IV.	Actions to be taken by the General Assembly	10

I. Introduction

A. Background

1. Permanently headquartered in Beirut, the Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia (ESCWA) has been relocated five times during its 40-year history. The first move occurred in 1976, following the outbreak of civil war in Lebanon, with the relocation of international staff to Amman for one year. The second relocation, to a temporary site in Baghdad, took place early in 1982, pending a third move to its permanent location in Baghdad, in 1983. The fourth move was a result of the Gulf crisis in 1990, when the Secretary-General decided to place all international staff members under temporary repatriation until the end of 1991.

2. Following consultations with the Government of Jordan, the Secretary-General recalled all international staff in August 1991. The arrangement to host the Commission in Amman on a temporary basis continued until 1997, when the decision was taken, at an ESCWA ministerial session, to return permanently to Lebanon. In addition to the five instances when ESCWA headquarters was moved on a temporary or permanent basis, an evacuation occurred during the Israel-Lebanon conflict in the summer of 2006. Staff members were deployed to work from Amman, Vienna and Beirut, as well as from their home countries. Between 2006 and 2008, there were additional instances of partial, temporary relocations to hotels in Beirut.

Beirut as headquarters of the Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia

3. By its resolution 1994/43, the Economic and Social Council decided that the permanent headquarters of ESCWA should be relocated to Beirut from Amman. On 27 August 1997, the United Nations and the Government of Lebanon concluded an agreement concerning the headquarters of ESCWA, by which the Government of Lebanon granted to the United Nations premises in Beirut on a permanent basis as the headquarters of ESCWA, United Nations funds and programmes and specialized agencies. The premises included the installed fixtures, surrounding grounds and parking spaces, and were furnished and equipped by the Government of Lebanon at no cost to the Organization.

4. The United Nations House is rented by the Government of Lebanon from the development corporation responsible for the reconstruction of central Beirut (Solidere). The building is located in downtown Beirut, near the parliament and the office of the Prime Minister.

B. Security environment and acceptable risk

5. Since 2005, the domestic and regional security situation has progressively deteriorated. Crash barriers, T-walls and a state-of-the-art perimeter access control system have been installed and additional security staff posts have been established. Regular security assessments have also been conducted. The extensive measures taken to improve the physical security of the building notwithstanding, both the United Nations and the Government of Lebanon considered that there was a need to relocate ESCWA headquarters to another location in the vicinity of Beirut. In the meantime, the United Nations and the Government of Lebanon have continued to mitigate the vulnerability of the building and its occupants by implementing

operational mitigation measures and have also relocated nearly all other United Nations system organizations personnel previously based at ESCWA headquarters (with the exception of ESCWA itself) to other offices throughout the capital and its vicinity.

6. In May 2009, the Government of Lebanon allocated land that met the United Nations security requirements for the purpose of constructing new United Nations premises north of Beirut. On 28 September 2009, the Ministry of Finance of Lebanon signed an agreement with the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Emigrants of Lebanon to allocate to the latter adjoining land parcels in Dbayeh with a total surface area of 72,934 m^2 to be placed at the disposal of the United Nations for constructing the new common premises. However, owing to several factors, the Government of Lebanon has still not been able to make the necessary resources available to construct a new building to house the Commission.

7. The security situation in Lebanon in general, and north of the Litani river in particular, has steadily deteriorated over the past few years, owing to various domestic, regional and international factors. An increase in polarization and radicalization in Lebanon, against a background of escalating regional tensions, notably the conflict in the Syrian Arab Republic, is of particular concern to the United Nations in Lebanon.

8. Given the current national and regional context, the number of serious security incidents has increased. With the introduction of a broad spectrum of terrorist tactics, techniques and procedures, it has been assessed that, while ESCWA is not deemed to be directly targeted at this point, the United Nations remains a potential target in the region.

9. Both regionally imported and home-grown radicalization is on the rise in Lebanon, as evidenced by the recent and sustained series of targeted explosions throughout the country and the capital region. It is assessed that the movement of extremist elements into and out of Lebanon armed with weapons, explosives and knowledge is steadily increasing. The deteriorating security situation within Lebanon, a repercussion of the conflict in neighbouring Syrian Arab Republic and of existing internal political tensions, raises the likelihood of the United Nations becoming a target for parties interested in undermining the reputation of the Organization, the Government of Lebanon or other regional actors.

Relations with the host Government

10. While ESCWA remains committed to pursuing with the host Government the option of relocating from its current headquarters to more secure premises, it is unlikely that agreement on the matter will be reached with the present caretaker administration. It is important to note that even if agreement on the construction of a new permanent location could be arrived at promptly, it would be more than three years before the construction of the building could be completed.

C. Blast assessment and findings

11. By virtue of its architectural design and geographical location, the ESCWA compound is vulnerable both to direct targeting by an improvised explosive device or a vehicle-borne improvised explosive device and to the indirect effects from a

nearby improvised explosive device or vehicle-borne improvised explosive device. The compound is located in the city centre, immediately adjacent to busy public roads.

12. The compound features a large glass facade that is highly vulnerable to blast effects, despite the installation of shatter-resistant film. The window framing system was assessed by a leading international firm in the field to be only partially effective in its capacity to hold the glass in place in a blast event. Additionally, the structural support columns are exposed, with the risk of possible failure in the event of a blast, resulting in the potential progressive collapse of parts of the building.

13. A continuing challenge for this location is the lack of stand-off distance and the existence of public roads around the compound that, although partially closed, remain a major complication in securing the complex.

14. In the light of the above-mentioned concerns, which were raised by the Department of Safety and Security during its security assessment, it was recommended that the performance of the building in the event of a blast be examined by a professional blast engineering company. Given the urgency of the requirement and based on expertise available at Headquarters in New York, the technical requirements for the blast assessment, and the work itself, was directly supervised by the Office of Central Support Services in consultation with ESCWA and the Department of Safety and Security.

15. The contracted company was tasked with performing the assessment. Three types of studies were conducted on the existing building:

(a) A window vulnerability analysis: analysis of the building's glazing in response to threat scenarios;

(b) A blast component analysis: analysis of the building's structural components in response to threat scenarios;

(c) A progressive collapse analysis: analysis of the building structure's response to the removal of a column, regardless of reason, at various locations.

16. The report and the findings of the assessment were released on 17 January 2014. The findings of the report highlighted the performance of the building against a possible blast. A variety of retrofit options were recommended to mitigate the risks identified. Following a review, three options were chosen based on the anticipated level of blast protection and the preliminary feasibility of retrofitting an existing, operational building. The proposed facade retrofits are discussed in section II below.

II. Proposals

17. The findings from the 2013 blast assessment described above also identified a number of structural remediation works that would significantly mitigate the safety and security risk exposure for United Nations staff and the United Nations House in Beirut. While the implementation of these measures can be expected to substantially mitigate current risks and decrease the exposure of ESCWA to the risk of a vehicle-borne improvised explosive device, they have to be seen as an interim measure, since possible future increased risks to ESCWA at its current location cannot be fully mitigated. However, as explained below, given all the circumstances, these measures are the best solution at this time.

18. The proposed implementation of mitigation measures aims to provide a response, in the short term, to risks posed by vehicle-borne improvised explosive devices. With these measures in place, the impact of such a threat would be significantly reduced. Ultimately, the only effective long-term course of action is a permanent relocation within Lebanon of the United Nations House, with the agreement and full cooperation of the host Government. As indicated in paragraph 6 above, the host Government granted the United Nations land for the purpose of constructing new United Nations premises in 2009; no progress, however, has been made on that initiative to date.

19. As mentioned above, there are significant considerations and challenges to be dealt with in terms of the construction of new premises within Lebanon, which, under the current circumstances, could not be completed in less than three years. Consequently, structural reinforcements are required as an interim measure to mitigate the increased exposure to higher-intensity blasts pending relocation of United Nations House in Beirut.

20. Following the completion of the blast assessment (phase 1) and its findings, the proposed structural remediation project work would take place in two further phases: phase 2, detailed design, and phase 3, construction work.

Phase 2: detailed design

21. The detailed design will include the necessary site investigations, calculations, preparation of construction drawings and testing, as well as drafting of the specifications and bills of quantities required for the procurement and construction phases.

Phase 3: construction work

22. The structural remediation work will consist of the following construction activities:

(a) The replacement of the existing shatter-resistant film on the glass facades. The existing film covering the building's glazing is more than 10 years old; it was installed in phases, starting on the lower floors, in 2001. Given the degree to which it is exposed to ultraviolet light, it will have suffered significant degradation. Shatter-resistant film is generally considered to have a life cycle of about 10 years, depending on meteorological conditions and exposure to sunlight. It should be noted that glazing debris can be fatal or cause serious injury to building occupants and has been the main cause of deaths in explosions affecting United Nations buildings in the past. Shatter-resistant film is considered to be the baseline or minimum fitting required to mitigate the risk of glass shattering into projectiles. Specialized testing could be undertaken during the design phase to determine any portions that might not need to be replaced, but this is expected to be marginal, if any;

(b) The facades would be reinforced by installing cable catch systems, consisting of cables anchored to concrete ceilings and floors above and below the facades. Cable catch systems are used in conjunction with shatter-resistant film and are designed so that in the event of a blast a cable would catch the glass or eject it to the outside of the building. Cable catch systems significantly enhance the resistance of glazing to blast-related hazards on all facades without appreciably affecting the overall performance or quality of the work environment, for example by retaining

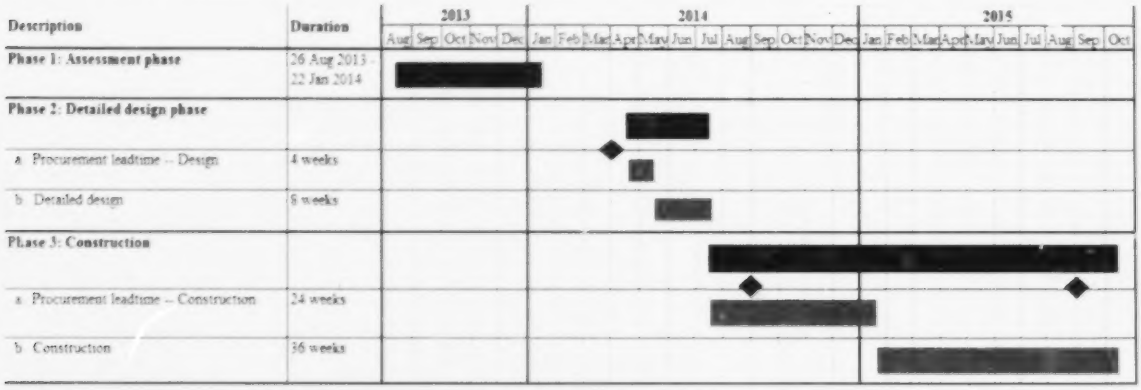
access to views and natural light. The effectiveness of catch cable systems relies upon effective shatter-resistant film existing on the building's glazing, as described above. Geotextile stone retrofitting (i.e. using filter fabrics for structural strengthening) would be required in locations above and below windows;

(c) The concrete floors and ceilings, known as slabs, are the most vulnerable structural components of the building. The most practical and cost-effective way to retrofit the structure to fortify these components is to apply fibre-reinforced polymer strips to the slabs to improve uplift capacity. This structural reinforcement is only required for the portion of the building that is susceptible owing to the exposure of the structural support columns.

Project schedule

23. It is envisaged that the structural remediation project can be completed in 44 weeks from the start of the detailed design phase, after allowing lead time for the procurement process, currently estimated at 24 weeks for the construction phase and 4 weeks for the design phase. The overall timeline for the proposed project is 18 months, as set out in the figure below.

Schedule for the structural remediation project as at 3 February 2014


Description
Duration
2013
2014
2015
Aug Sep Oct Nov Dec Jan Feb Mar Apr May Jun Jul Aug Sep Oct Nov Dec Jan Feb Mar Apr May Jun Jul Aug Sep Oct
Phase 1: Assessment phase
26 Aug 2013 - 22 Jan 2014
Phase 2: Detailed design phase
a. Procurement leadtime – Design
4 weeks
b. Detailed design
8 weeks
Phase 3: Construction
a. Procurement leadtime – Construction
24 weeks
b. Construction
56 weeks

◆ Secretary-General reporting to the General Assembly, subject to Member States decision

Project coordination

24. Should the project be approved by the General Assembly, the project owner would be the Executive Secretary of ESCWA.

25. In line with practices and procedures established for all construction projects at offices away from Headquarters, the ESCWA project team would be supported by the Office of Central Support Services, Department of Management, which would provide technical guidance and advice, including by sharing lessons learned from similar capital projects undertaken by the Organization and senior-level coordination.

26. Regular coordination activities between ESCWA and the Office of Central Support Services would be undertaken throughout the duration of the project. Such

activities would include a review of technical drawings and specifications and a review of administrative and project management procedures, including, especially, a risk assessment.

III. Resource requirements

27. Resource requirements for the proposals described above for the biennium 2014-2015 amount to $7,306,900 (net of staff assessment) of non-recurrent costs. The costs associated with the proposals are summarized in tables 1 and 2 below, by expenditure component and budget section. Resource requirements include the proposed establishment of two general temporary assistance positions (1 P-4 and 1 Local level) and other related general operating requirements, as well as capital expenditure requirements for the structural enhancement work to be undertaken throughout the remainder of the biennium.

28. The anticipated schedule envisages the overall project to be completed in 44 weeks, after allowing for procurement lead times. This would see the completion of all structural remediation work by the end of December 2015.

Table 1

Resource requirements under sections 22, Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia, and 33, Construction, alteration, improvement and major maintenance, by object of expenditure

(Thousands of United States dollars)

Object of expenditure	*2014-2015 initial appropriation*	*Additional requirements*	*2014-2015 revised estimate*
Other staff costs	1 708.3	380.1	2 088.4
Travel of staff	709.9	15.0	724.9
General operating expenses	3 660.9	4.0	3 664.9
Alteration and improvement	20 532.0	6 907.8	27 439.8
Total (net of staff assessment)	**26 611.1**	**7 306.9**	**33 918.0**

Table 2

Resource requirements by programme budget section

(Thousands of United States dollars)

Budget section	*2014-2015 initial appropriation*	*Additional requirements*	*2014-2015 revised estimate*
22. Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia	70 189.5	399.1	70 588.6
33. Construction, alteration, improvement and major maintenance	75 268.7	6 907.8	82 176.5
36. Staff assessment	486 831.8	53.6	486 885.4
Total	**632 290.0**	**7 360.5**	**639 650.5**

Section 22, Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia

Other staff costs: general temporary assistance ($380,100)

29. ESCWA does not have the in-house capacity to oversee the management of the proposed construction activities on a day-to-day basis. In order to secure project completion by the end of the biennium, there is a requirement for a local in-house dedicated project management team comprising a project manager at the P-4 level supported by a Local level staff member funded under general temporary assistance. The project manager would report to the Director of Administration at ESCWA and work in close collaboration with the Chief of the General Services Section and the Chief of the Security and Safety Section. The project manager would assume responsibility for the overall planning, implementation and completion of the project, on schedule and within budget. The Local level staff member would provide overall administrative assistance to the project manager, provide support with respect to quality assurance, monitoring the project risk plan and reporting on related risks, and draft documentation and reports on the project's status.

30. The estimated one-time provision for general temporary assistance for an anticipated project period of 18 months is $380,100.

Travel of staff ($15,000)

31. The proposed resources would provide for two trips during the biennium between ESCWA and Headquarters in New York to consult and report on progress in project implementation.

General operating expenses ($4,000)

32. The proposed resources would cover the one-time provision for office automation equipment ($3,000) and communication ($1,000) for the two staff members on the project team.

Section 33, Construction, alteration, improvement and major maintenance

Alteration and improvement ($6,907,800)

33. The requirements of $6,907,800 would provide for a uniform level of blast retrofits comprising the replacement of shatter-resistant film ($1,258,000), the installation of a cable catch system and geotextile stone retrofit ($4,760,400) and a structural slab retrofit ($536,400), as well as design fees ($353,000) for the security retrofitting work.

IV. Actions to be taken by the General Assembly

34. **The General Assembly is requested:**

(a) **To approve the present proposals of the Secretary-General;**

(b) **To approve the establishment of two temporary positions (1 P-4 and 1 Local level) under section 22, Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia, of the programme budget for the biennium 2014-2015;**

(c) **To appropriate an additional non-recurrent amount of $7,306,900 under the programme budget for the biennium 2014-2015 comprising increases**

under section 22 ($399,100), section 33, Construction, alteration, improvement and major maintenance ($6,907,800), and section 36, Staff assessment ($53,600), to be offset by a corresponding amount under income section 1, Income from staff assessment, of the proposed programme budget for the biennium 2014-2015.

35. The non-recurrent amount of $7,306,900 would represent a charge against the contingency fund for the biennium 2014-2015.